



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described the COVID-19 pandemic as a “global health crisis unlike any in the 75-year history of the United Nations”. A larger scale COVID-19 outbreak would put significant pressure on both the health sector and economy.

The UN in Bhutan (FAO, IFAD, ITC, UNDP, UNESCAP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNODC, WFP, and WHO) has moved quickly and pro-actively to respond to COVID-19. In particular, UN agencies developed a joint response framework aligned with the “UN Framework for the Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19,” including both short-term measures to mitigate negative social and economic consequences along with medium- to long-term investments to strengthen the capacity to re-build and be resilient to future crises.

## Situation in Numbers

as of 23 June 2021

**1970 COVID-19 confirmed cases**

**267 Active cases**

**1702 Recovered**

**1 Death**

Source: Ministry of Health, Bhutan



### 1 **HEALTH FIRST:** Protecting health services and systems during the crisis



### 2 **PROTECTING PEOPLE:** Social protection and basic services

- **UNDP** - UNDP supported the piloting of an e-health system through mobile Cardiotocography devices (iCTGs) for the initiative “Reaching every pregnant woman with quality gynecological and obstetric services through iCTG”, in partnership with JICA. The support includes procurement and distribution of 46 mobile iCTG devices to some of the most rural parts of the country.
- **UNICEF** - UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health(MoH) in implementing community engagement interventions (RCCE) to support the national vaccine roll out plan. As part of the plan, 30 chairpersons of the local government participated in a virtual Q&A session with experts from the Ministry of Health. As a result, local government leaders-initiated community engagement activities in their respective communities to get vaccinated. More than 60 district scout secretaries and leadership scouts participated in a virtual Q&A session with experts from the Health Ministry. As a result, scouts provided support to the districts health officials in mobilizing communities to come for the vaccination.
- **WHO** - WHO supported a review on health preparedness and response towards COVID-19. The three day review was attended by all the health officials who were at forefront responding to this pandemic. WHO supported training of 180 doctors and 250 nurses on ICU management of COVID-19 positive cases. In addition, WHO supported the remuneration of 121 frontline workers, the hiring of 21 vehicles to provide essential health services and the recruitment of 23 hotline managers for a COVID-19 toll free station.
- **UNFPA** - UNFPA through DFAT funding (the Australian Government’s Gender Equality Fund) supported the refurbishment of six emergency shelter homes during COVID-19 including standardization of procurement items, development of operational guides and training modules for shelter managers and volunteers. The centers which will serve as shelter home for survivors of gender-based violence were handed over with the basic amenities and equipment to the Dzongdas, who are also the Chairs of the Multi-Sectoral Task Force at the district level. The six emergency shelters in six districts include Samtse, Sarpong, Zhemgang, Samdrup Jongkhar, Bumthang and Trashigang.
- **UNICEF** - UNICEF worked with the Ministry Education to support the teachers ahead of reopening schools in February 2021. 140 (63 F) school counselors were oriented online on the Welcome Back Check-in Session with children of all grades using the guidance developed by the MHPSS Collaborative and Save the Children.
- **WFP** - WFP received USD 52,700 as First Line of Defense (FLOD) funds targeted to support front line workers who are supporting the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. In consultation with the RGoB, WFP is finalizing the activities to support the pandemic preparedness actions of the Government.

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### ECONOMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY: Protecting jobs, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the informal sector workers

- FAO** - FAO received a request for intensive vegetable production in selected urban/peri-urban areas for employing displaced employees from the private sector and youth. The project focuses on technology-induced vegetable production. The support covers over 77 acres giving employment to over 300 laid-off employees.
- ITC** - E-platforms, including the Bhutan Trade Information Portal and Agriculture Market Information System were launched to enable Bhutanese businesses to remain up-to-date with the latest regulations and market access requirements. ITC has provided advisory support on trade policy, investment promotion and business advocacy, integrating critical aspects for business growth after COVID-19.
- WFP** - WFP started implementing a two-year project on strengthening the agriculture sector statistical and M&R system, in partnership with the RNR statistical division and relevant agencies. The near real-time integrated agriculture statistical, monitoring and reporting system will provide sector-wide agriculture data for better production planning, targeting of agriculture services and for stronger feedback and learning across the sector.

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### SOCIAL COHESION AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

- UNDP** - UNDP supported piloting e-litigation in 14 courts to ensure continued access to justice services even during the COVID-19 pandemic including for vulnerable groups such as women, and people living with disabilities through an online platform. This will enhance the efficiency of justice services, as well as contribute to access to justice for rural populations. As of February 2021, the first batch of equipment has been handed over to the regional courts. UNDP supported the procurement of additional equipment for courts in the high-risk areas in the South. The E-litigation platform was launched on 21 April 2021.



Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck  
UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador

#### My Body is My Own- Claiming the Right to Autonomy and Self-determination

'Responding to an alarming increase in the number of domestic violence cases across Bhutan as a result of the pandemic, Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, raised awareness of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights and Gender Based Violence through televised statements on national television, observation of virtual global days and the launch of the 2021 State of the World Population Report "My Body is My Own – Claiming the Right to Autonomy and Self-Determination." As the keynote speaker at the 54th Commission on Population and Development held in April this year, Her Majesty encouraged everyone to "move beyond counting, quantification, and assessment" and instead embrace "bold and courageous initiatives to inspire innovative actions to promote women's rights" in order to create a world in which "women's equality is guaranteed, not granted". In 2020, Her Majesty was presented with the UN Population Award for her outstanding contribution to advancing sexual and reproductive rights.'

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### MACROECONOMIC RESPONSE AND MULTILATERAL COLLABORATION

- UNDP** - UNDP together with UNRCO-ADB is supporting the Ministry of Finance to strengthen macroeconomic forecasting and modeling that will enable the Government to 1) simulate the relationships and interactions between different sectors of the economy, 2) estimate economy-wide impacts of shocks, including scenarios related to the impact of COVID-19.
- UNESCAP** - UNESCAP organized a high-level policy dialogue on COVID-19 and South Asia with the planning and economic ministers of all South Asian countries including the Minister of Economic Affairs of RGoB. The event facilitated the sharing of experiences and lessons learned in mitigating the pandemic and enabled discussion on regional cooperation. UNESCAP also provided policy advice to Bhutan for sustainable graduation in view of the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on its economy and provided technical assistance to the National Task Force preparing the 21st Century Economic Roadmap of Bhutan.

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### Communications, Data and M&E

- UNODC** - Recognizing the increasing Trafficking in Persons incidences fueled by vulnerabilities caused through COVID-19 pandemic, UNODC is currently carrying out training of all the judges across the country in order to address and combat Trafficking in Persons and to enhance criminal justice system in the country.
- WFP** - As part of the safe reopening of schools and encouraging parents to send healthy, nutritious packed lunches for their children, a social media campaign on healthy packed-lunches is being initiated with the Government using the Healthy Drukyul platform.

For further information, please check the full report on the UN Bhutan website or reach out to Jacqueline van der Woude, Team leader, [margaretha.vanderwoude@un.org](mailto:margaretha.vanderwoude@un.org)

COVID-19  
RESPONSE

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